



DENCA Advisory Council Minutes

August 17, 2011

Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Grand Junction, CO

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose

Absent: Tamara Minnick and Terry Kimber

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, Alissa Leavitt – Reynolds and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Doug Atchley of Delta County, Lee Gelatt, Sherry Schenk, Jan Shepherd, Eric Rechel, Jan Potterveld, Joyce Olson, Kent Davis, Terry Gray, Mary Tucker, Kay Simonson

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. and noted there was a quorum.

Public comment (Round 1)

Jan Potterveld (Grand Mesa Back Country Horsemen) opened public comment by returning to Cactus Park. He said there had been a recent meeting of non-motorized, non-mechanized recreation groups, composed of Quiet Use Group, Great Old Broads for Wilderness and the Grand Mesa Back Country Horsemen. The consensus was to make a formal recommendation to the Advisory Council and the BLM. The recommendation will be to treat Cactus Park as a SRMA with two zones – the northern zone to be used for quiet use, the southern to have an emphasis on motorized recreation. The dividing line would be between Ninemile Hill and Gibbler Mountain. The detailed recommendation should be ready in September.

Lee Gelatt (Quiet Use) urged the Council and BLM to recognize the need for a quiet use trail in every zone, because more quiet users will be coming to the D-E NCA.

Eric Rechel (Sierra Club) urged the BLM and Council to consider permit systems before resources are damaged by over-use. He suggested that boating on the Gunnison River should have a permit system by next summer.

Jan Shepherd (Great Old Broads for Wilderness) asked for a quiet use trail in Escalante Canyon from the McCarty Trail to a rim site above the Gunnison River. She also said the trailhead needs more parking.

Potterveld added he'd just returned from a horseback trip to the Flat-top Wilderness near Meeker, where the Forest Service had a 25-heartbeat rule (people, horses, mule). He recommended a similar rule for the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness.

Recap of August 3 meeting

Katie Stevens said there was a good discussion about the meaning of Special Recreation Management Areas and what the legal requirements are for protecting and conserving cultural sites. There was also an extensive overview about Escalante Canyon and discussion of how much the canyon should be a publicized destination for out-of-area visitors. There were also questions raised about whether Delta County and the City of Delta had developed a common vision for how the NCA's management could complement city and county priorities, regarding D-E NCA and tourism. **Atchley** noted discussion about keeping key roads open in Zone 5 (Escalante Canyon, Sawmill and Dry Mesas, and the ridges southwest of Dominguez Canyon Wilderness). Advocates for motorized recreation spoke of their desire to keep Zone 5 open to motor vehicles, as they have good access to trails in the winter.

Harris noted that Escalante Canyon landowners expressed concern about the growing popularity of the canyon and the Potholes area. That growing popularity carries implications for safety, increased road maintenance and who pays for these higher expenses?

Steele asked about the cottonwood gallery along Cottonwood Creek and **Stevens** said it was a high quality habitat that needed protection.

In a discussion about Delta and Delta County, County Commissioner **Atchley** said the county has strong feelings about the value of multiple use and livestock grazing – that all activities on D-E NCA need to be considered. **Potterveld** asked about a quiet use trail up the Cottonwood Creek canyon. **Stevens** responded that the area's ruggedness is a barrier to building a trail from the rim down, but noted the possibility for a trail in the canyon bottom.

Culture/DENCA

BLM Archeologist **Leavitt – Reynolds** reviewed what's known and unknown about D-E NCA's cultural resources; the national laws the BLM has to comply with and the challenges that entails.

She defined cultural resources as "A definite location of human activity, occupation, or use, normally greater than 50 years of age, identifiable through field inventory, historical documentation, or oral evidence."

The term includes archaeological, historic, or architectural sites, structures, places or sites or places with important public and scientific uses, and may include definite locations (sites or places) of traditional cultural properties. Cultural resources are concrete, material places and things that are located, classified, ranked, and managed through the system of identifying, protecting, and utilizing for public benefit described in laws, regulations, and the BLM Manuals.

There are also non-material aspects to cultural resources, including:

- Historic and Current Traditional Uses
- Sacred Sites
- Religious Freedom
- Maintaining Cultural Practices
- Acquiring plant resources
- Oral Histories

Certain sites and landscapes are very important to the Ute. These sites connect them to their traditional lands and their ancestors. Native American elders provide information about cultural resource sites, sacred sites, and sites of importance for the current religious practices of Native Americans who used to live in the area now known as the DENCA.

Leavitt – Reynolds reviewed the major laws, especially the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. That requires the BLM to “**take into account the effect of the undertaking** on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register...”

“Undertakings” (building, road construction, energy/mineral development) require the following:

- Step 1: Archaeological Inventory
- Step 2: Report is submitted to land manager with cultural resource staff recommendations.
- Step 3: Land Manager reviews and sends report on to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) who agrees or disagrees with BLM’s recommendations of eligibility and effect.
- Step 4: If properties are going to be affected, the agency and SHPO work together to find ways to mitigate damage to cultural properties.

Some projects result in adverse effects to cultural resources. The BLM and SHPO can come to an agreement to avoid adverse effect by one or more of the actions below:

- Excavation (Data Recovery) - expensive
- Monitoring of sites (used in some cases)
- Relocation of project (avoidance)

Some of the unique projects initiated by local BLM archeologists and partners include:

- Ethno-history and Ethno-botany Projects
- Cultural Resource Internships for Native American youth
- Ute Learning Garden
- Site Steward Program
- Outreach to school groups and others

These projects are designed to respond to Ute concerns and better protect resources.

Leavitt – Reynolds emphasized that D-E NCA has a high density of cultural and historical sites (anything over 50 years of age). That assessment is based on over 1,400 known sites -- 18 percent of D-E NCA being surveyed. Challenges for D-E NCA cultural resources include travel management, grazing, public access (can lead to vandalism), native and local needs and incorrect data.

Steele asked whether the Ute tribes have helped identify cultural sites in D-E NCA? The answer was not yet, but BLM is working closely with them. **Harris** said there is great potential for site stewardship, and suggested that some cultural sites are better off without the public knowing about them.

Leavitt – Reynolds explained the criteria codes for eligible sites under the NHPA: A is a connection to a historic event or person; B is for important people at local, state, national level; C is for unique buildings; D is for scientific data; and Criterion G is for a site with Cold War significance, such as a uranium mine. Discussion turned to federal recognition of the Calamity Camp and how the Billy Rambo property is a historic site.

Break

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness PowerPoint Presentation

Windsor walked through the key words and phrases of the Wilderness Act, wilderness qualities like untrammeled, undeveloped, natural, outstanding opportunities for solitude, and supplemental values.

At a glance: The Dominguez Canyon Wilderness is characterized by large mesas dissected by deep red slick-rock canyons, perennial water and arroyos.

BLM land is 66,193.2 acres.

State land is 638 acres.

Two inholdings: The Billy Rambo Homestead in Little Dominguez Canyon consists of an old house, an outbuilding, old farming implements, ranching and farming supplies. The property the homestead occupies has been deeded to BLM. Meanwhile, the Colorado Division of Wildlife has a 640-acre parcel

on Sowbelly Ridge, Tatum Ridge, and Camp Ridge. There is very little threat of further development of this area.

Geology: The mesa tops are predominantly the Dakota/Burro Canyon Formation.

Canyon walls reveal layers of the Morrison, Entrada, Kayenta, Wingate, Chinle and to the Pre-Cambrian formation on the canyon floor. The Pre-Cambrian rock is up to 1.8 billion years old.

Between the Pre-Cambrian and Chinle is the "Great Unconformity" -- a billion years of missing rock formations.

Paleontology: The Wilderness has moderate to high, to very high potential for fossil sites, particularly in the Morrison and Chinle formations.

Water: Water quality is excellent in the wilderness. BLM has filed for instream water rights that are working their way through water court. If approved by the courts, it would appropriate all water (above a certain development allowance) to wilderness and natural values.

Land: The land rises from the river, southwest to mesas and the Uncompahgre Plateau. Ecosystems range from upper Sonoran piñon-juniper desert along the Gunnison River, to Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, to aspen forests in the higher areas of the national forest.

Vegetation: Piñon-juniper woodlands, desert shrubland/saltbush, sagebrush shrublands and mountain shrub communities characterize the wilderness. Most of the wilderness is meeting land health standards. The few areas not meeting are Little Dominguez Creek (grazing and wildfire) and McCarty Bench (decline in grasses and increase in decadent sage brush). There are three sensitive plant species in the wilderness:

- Colorado hookless cactus – Threatened listing under Endangered Species Act
- Grand Junction milkvetch -- BLM Sensitive Species
- Naturita milkvetch -- BLM Sensitive Species

Sensitive species are those that the BLM state director has determined warrant additional conservation attention.

PPSV: Planning for Priority Species and Vegetation (PPSV) is a methodology being used by the planning team to organize biological data and analyses and inform decision making during RMP planning. Most of the wilderness ecosystems and species of concern are in good to very good shape. Two ecosystems are evaluated as being in "fair" condition.

Sagebrush/shrublands:

1. Unbalanced ratio of grass to shrub to forb.
2. Sagebrush communities do not provide sufficient habitat for sage grouse, which require sage cover between 10-30 percent.
3. Overabundance of the non-native crested wheatgrass, which reduces the biological diversity and ecological value of the community.

Aquatic Systems

1. Lack of native trout
2. Lack of spawning access to Big and Little Dominguez Creeks
3. Excessive concentrations of selenium.

Wildlife: Species include the collared lizard, desert bighorn sheep, mountain lions, golden eagles and peregrine falcons. Bighorn sheep inhabit much of the wilderness. Lambing takes place around Triangle Mesa and Star Mesa. Proximity to domestic sheep and goats in the NCA is a concern. Mr. Rambo keeps 10-20 goats.

Elk are to be found around Wagon Park and in the Escalante Canyon area and points southeast.

Cultural: Only 18 percent of the Wilderness has been surveyed by archeologists.

Livestock grazing: Grazing "shall" be allowed to continue in the Wilderness, and new livestock water developments "may" be built, according to the terms of the 2009 Omnibus Act. There are three grazing

allotments in the Wilderness, held by two local ranchers. There are no sheep on these allotments and the number of cattle ranges between 1,620 and 2,120 AUM.

Recreation: The Wilderness is strictly non-motorized and non-mechanized, so the primary recreation activities will be hiking and horseback riding. BLM estimates 9,500 Wilderness visits annually.

The Bridgeport bridge is the most popular point of access. There are five other recreation access points to the wilderness: Cactus Park, Dominguez Campground, Gunnison Pack Trail, McCarty Trailhead, and the mouth of Dominguez Canyon.

Recreational use via the Bridgeport Bridge contributes one-half of Wilderness visitation.

In order to deal with resource/user conflicts upstream from the mouth of the Dominguez Creek Canyon, BLM established a day-use area closed to camping, up the Big Dominguez Creek to the waterfall and nearby rock panel. In the past, campers have left trash, fire rings and human waste. Since the area was closed to camping, such problems have diminished. The area along Little Dominguez Creek, which is the Billy Rambo property, is also day-use only.

There are 101 miles of routes within the wilderness. This total includes:

- 33 miles of these routes are former roads (with evidence of construction)
- 45 miles are old two-tracks
- 22 miles are single-track routes.

A recreation visitor preference survey of wilderness recreationists, taken by the Natural Resource Land Policy Institute, found that 40 percent of respondents cited Quiet/Contemplative values as why they recreated in the wilderness. Another 26.7 percent cited Affiliation and Social Cohesion values.

Wilderness planning: Federal land management agencies use the “Keeping It Wild” program to monitor trends in wilderness character across the National Wilderness Preservation System (includes units managed by USFWS, NPS, BLM and USFS). The agencies monitor the following characteristics:

- “Untrammeled”
- “Natural”
- “Undeveloped”
- “Solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”
- “Unique and supplemental values”

Definitions and indicators were discussed, as well as results of wilderness focus group questions posed to Delta and Grand Junction residents by the Natural Resource Land Policy Institute. In assessing the most important wilderness values for those two communities, Delta citizens feel both the Wilderness and people should be left alone. In contrast, the Grand Junction focus group puts a priority on naturalness and unique values, like the desert bighorn herd.

Discussion turned to the question of whether BLM management should prefer the untrammelled value or natural value? **Windsor** said BLM management cannot be all things to all values all the time. Where put preference? **Windsor** sees a range of alternatives between the different values embraced by Delta and Grand Junction. The Council also discussed how they might consider focus group information, noting that much of it still needs consideration by the Council.

Public Discussion

Discussion turned to how different priorities on wilderness values would play out in fighting wildfires. Wildfire, for example, can destroy invaluable rock panels, or replace native habitat with invasive cheatgrass – both off which would be unacceptable. Although wildfire in the wilderness has not been a big issue in the past, the discussion showed how the Council understands the implications of one wilderness value having priority over another.

Comment

Shepherd expressed concern over the health and size of the wilderness bighorn herd. She noted that focus groups supported whatever was needed to help the bighorn. Hikers with dogs increase stress

among bighorn, because the dogs are viewed as predator threats. Harris said the Council would like more information about bighorn and Stevens said Division of Wildlife experts would be invited in to a future conversation.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be September 7 at the Delta Performing Arts Center in Delta. The focus of the meeting will be the Delta/Grand Junction focus group responses and bighorn sheep biology in the NCA.